

Wilson Opening Statement for Hearing on the Defense Health Plan

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, today released the following opening statement for the subcommittee's hearing on the Administration's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request for the Defense Health Plan:

April 21, 2010

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Congressman Joe Wilson (R-SC), Ranking Member of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Military Personnel, today released the following opening statement for the subcommittee's hearing on the Administration's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request for the Defense Health Plan:

"Thank you, Chairwoman Davis. Today the Subcommittee meets to hear testimony on the Defense Health Program for Fiscal Year 2011. Although we routinely have an annual hearing on the Defense Health Program, I believe there is nothing routine about the military health system and the extraordinary care it provides to our service members and their families. I have firsthand knowledge of these remarkable military and civilian medical professionals from my son, Addison, who is an orthopedic resident in the Navy.

"The subcommittee remains committed to ensuring that the men and women who are entrusted with the lives of our troops have the resources to continue their work for future generations of our most deserving military beneficiaries. I would like to express my deep appreciation to all of the military health system leadership and personnel who are responsible for delivering the highest quality healthcare during these most challenging times.

"To begin, I want to commend the Department of Defense for sending us a budget that does not rely on raising TRICARE fees to help finance the Defense Health Program. It appears the Defense Health Program is fully funded; however, I remain concerned a portion of the funding is based on projected savings from several programs that may not be fully realized. I would like to know how the Department of Defense plans to cover any unexpected shortfalls in the Defense Health Program if the savings from initiatives such as federal pricing for pharmaceuticals doesn't materialize.

"With that, I am anxious to hear from our witnesses today about the progress the Department has made in developing a comprehensive approach to providing world class health care to our beneficiaries while at the same time controlling costs. I would like to know how the Military Health System is meeting the medical needs of our beneficiaries today and what process you use for determining the medical requirements of future beneficiaries. I am interested in knowing how you have included the stakeholders in military health care in the discussions about providing world class health care and the future of the Military Health System.

"Further, I would like to hear from the witnesses on how the Defense Health Program supports the critical mental health services needed by our service members and their families, particularly the National Guard and reserve members who rely primarily on TRICARE Standard.

"I would also like to better understand from our military Surgeons General whether the Defense Health Program will fully support their responsibility to maintain medical readiness, provide healthcare to eligible beneficiaries, provide battlefield medicine to our brave men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan and care for our combat veterans through the long recovery process when they become injured and wounded.

"Finally, with regard to TRICARE, which is now regarded as a health care delivery system worthy of emulation, I quite frankly don't understand why the Department of Defense would not want to explicitly protect it from any unintended consequences that may arise from the health care reform law. Congress has already acted to make clear and explicit what the recent health care reform bill did not-that TRICARE meets the statutory requirement for minimum essential health care. The Department of Defense did not object to that recent Congressional action. Now it's time to make explicit in law what President Obama promised would be explicit in the health care reform-the Secretary of Defense would remain in control of the DOD health care program. No one should object to Congress making that control explicit in law. While some may feel that this is an unnecessary precaution, we owe our military that clearly stated protection."

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